

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Reformation Sunday, November 2, 2014

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 33, 283, 262, 441:1-2, 263, 50.

Lessons: 2 Samuel 7, Romans 3:19-28, John 8:31-36.

Sermon Text: 1 Kings 8:57-58

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

God had given Martin Luther many gifts. He became a scholar and teacher of theology and a preacher of the Word of God. And he managed, by the grace of God, to use these gifts for God's service. Nothing was more important to him than to tell of the love of God to and for hopeless sinners. One of the early noteworthy occasions on which he proclaimed the love of God was questioning and attacking indulgences. Indulgences were pieces of paper which told people that punishments for certain sins were taken away. But people had to buy and otherwise pay for these indulgences, which removed temporal punishments due to sin which must be paid for in purgatory, a fictitious time and place created by the Roman Catholic Church and the pope where people would spend time after death purging themselves from certain sins. I'm no expert on Roman Catholic theology but this false idea may help account for the fact that the pope says that even atheists can get to heaven.

On October 31, 1517 Luther proposed to debate indulgences on the basis of the truth of the Word of God. That is considered the beginning of the Lutheran Reformation.

And God has given us the calling of continuing to proclaim the Word of God in its truth and purity.

**"May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our fathers;
may he never leave us nor forsake us."**

1. Let's look at Solomon's prayer for his people,
2. And our prayer.

These words are part of King Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, about 1000 B.C. About 450 years earlier the Israelites entered Canaan and began conquering the people there, making themselves at home and taking their houses to live in.

But up until the time of our sermon text, while people were now living in houses and even palaces, the house of the Lord was just a tent, the tabernacle that had been built at God's specific instructions in the wilderness almost 500 years earlier.

About 40 years before these words of Solomon, which are really part of a prayer, were spoken, we read that his father David asked God about building a temple, a permanent house for the Lord. You heard that entire bit of history in our Old Testament lesson. ***"After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent." (2 Samuel 7:1-2 NIV)*** Well, David did not get to build a temple for the Lord, but that was assigned to his son Solomon and God gave specific instructions for that temple.

God had made it clear to them that with his gracious presence in their midst, they were sure of continued blessings. ***"May he never leave us nor forsake us"*** was the prayer. They no doubt thought first of God preserving them and keeping them safe from their physical enemies. But the believers among them were certainly looking at these words in a spiritual sense. No child of God, no believer in Jesus as Savior wants God to abandon him or her. The older we get the more we realize that without God with us and guarding us and

keeping us everything would be hopeless. We never want to be forsaken, abandoned. And children especially get terrified at the thought of being abandoned and forsaken.

When Solomon asked ***"May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep the commands, decrees and regulations he gave our fathers"*** Solomon was surely thinking of all God's instructions to his people, in whatever form they may have come to them.

The completion of the temple was the culmination of God's Old Testament plans. Israel had become a great nation. Israel had received rest in the land promised to Abraham and to them as Abraham's descendants. The land in which they lived and the temple in which God now had his dwelling would be constant reminders that the promised Messiah would also appear.

The temple was now a place around which they could gather to praise the Lord God. Their praise included psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs and hearing the Scriptures. This was done on special religious festivals, on the Sabbath Day every week, and even daily. But more importantly, the most obvious part of their physical praise was sacrifice: bloody sacrifices that all pointed forward to Jesus Christ the very Son of God who would come into the world to save mankind from all sin. Paul plainly says of this kind of things that ***"These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ."*** (Colossians 2:17)

Isaiah wrote later that their worship had deteriorated into mere outward doing of the deed in Isaiah 29:13. ***"The Lord says: 'These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.'"***

But the sacrifices would end with one great sacrifice – the sacrifice of the sinless Jesus on the altar of the cross to pay for all sins of all mankind, once and for all.

Luther's great message from the Word of God was the Gospel. This was a great revelation to people who had been taught primarily law by the Roman Catholic Church, especially human laws added to God's laws. Luther brought them the freedom from sin that had long been a hidden treasure. Because he brought the words of Jesus into their lives, they could be set free from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

Solomon was asking ***"May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our fathers; may he never leave us nor forsake us. May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep the commands, decrees and regulations he gave our fathers."*** We have the freedom to walk in all God's ways and keep his commands. All who believe have freedom to run in God's commands, for he has set our hearts free. (Psalm 119:32)

We gather in a special joint worship to celebrate the Reformation. This Reformation service is a special service not only to celebrate our church history going back at least 497 years, to 1517, but also to celebrate a day of thanksgiving that the Lord has helped us hitherto. He has helped us up till now, and he has been with us.

But we are also today asking ***"May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our fathers."***

It may seem that we who seek to hold to the pure Word of God are a shrinking minority. But look at the history of God's people. Things got worse and worse for God's chosen people before the Savior was born. God tells us that terrible times will come upon the world before Jesus Christ comes on judgment day to take all believers to the blessings of heaven. And while the Bible, especially in Acts, shows some remarkable growth in numbers of people based on the power of God's Word, church history since the time of the New Testament books also shows some terrible persecution and hard times for believers in Jesus Christ. Barely 100 years before Luther a man named John Hus was burned at the stake for challenging the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church much as Luther did.

But look at the joyous occasion for the words we are considering today. This was the fulfillment of what David and many others wanted for many years. They were in the promised land. The ark of the covenant, the holy things of the Lord had been in a tent until now, but now God had made a permanent place for them. Permanent, that is, until Jesus Christ the very Son of God became flesh and lived among men.

God saw to it that his people had places to live and prosper. Before he insisted on building a permanent home for himself, a place where his presence would be found, he provided abundant material, earthly blessings for his chosen people.

These words are particularly timely today. ***"May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our fathers."***

We want the Lord our God to be with us. And we want the Lord our God to be with our children and grandchildren and with all generations until Jesus comes to end this sinful world for good.

We will only live for a short time. The Psalmist says to us ***"The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away."*** (Psalms 90:10 KJV) But God's Word endures forever.

As we look back over our shoulders today, we, like God's people in Solomon's time, also see a past filled with God's earthly and spiritual blessings. Our prayer for future blessing might well be the words spoken by Solomon: ***"May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our fathers."*** May he give us hearts that fear him and bodies that serve him.

We want the Lord our God to continue to give us the freedom ***"to walk in all his ways and to keep the commands, decrees and regulations he gave our fathers."*** That doesn't simply mean some kind of freedom of religion to worship God as we want to. That means freedom from sin, the power of Satan, and eternal death and damnation. That means freedom to obey God's will.

In the verse just before our text we read ***"Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses."*** (1 Kings 8:56 NIV)

The word "rest" implied victory over all their earthly enemies, enemies that were much stronger than the Israelites. It also implied a fulfillment of all that God had promised. That very same word Rest is used to describe the heavenly rest which God has promised to us in Jesus.

Our eternal rest in heaven will mean a complete fulfillment of all God's most gracious promises and a complete victory over all enemies, even death.

We are free as you heard in our Gospel lesson: ***"To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'"*** (John 8:31-32 NIV)

We are free not because of anything we have done, but free because God has made us free from the bondage of sin. God has given us marvelous blessings, not the least of which is gathering in a beautiful house of worship. Even in our short history as a church body some of us have worshiped in living rooms, basements, rented rooms. Yes, we have a great place to gather for worship today. But more importantly, we have the truth of God's Word as the center of our worship!

And so we ask that God turn our hearts toward him every day. This is something we want to pray every day, individually, personally, and as families, as a congregation, as a conference. ***"May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our fathers; may he never leave us nor forsake us. May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep the commands, decrees and regulations he gave our fathers."*** Please, God, grant this to all of us! Amen.